

**THE
PROLEGOMENA
TO THE
RULE OF THE ORDER**

A MORAL COVENANT AND CORPORATE DISCIPLINE

A Prologue to Corporate Discipline

I

1. We the Order: Ecumenical, by our free decision, before the Creator of our individual and corporate destinies and in radical, total and unconditional obedience to the happening of Profound Humanness in our time, take upon ourselves this covenant and rule of life, for the sake of a particular corporate mission within the total calling of the People of God, to which we have been commonly called.

II

2. We confess, in the first place, we can do this only because we have been seized by the radical fact of our acceptance, and the awesome possibility of embracing our lives on the terms they are given. This has driven us to commit our lives to being the people who embody this good news in society.

3. We acknowledge, secondly, that we can do this only because we find ourselves so historically situated that we are commonly called to exercise this self-understanding and mission in a particular time and place and endeavour.

III

4. We further acknowledge and confess that we have been immediately driven to this course by the new vision of authentic humanness as "the courage to be" before the final Mystery of life and death. This has birthed a radical freedom for people to involve themselves completely in this world; and we believe that free involvement in the world demands a disciplined life.

5. We have been driven by the new image of mission that has emerged in the People of God. This involves the commitment to declare the reality of Profound Humanness in and to history, for without this declaration people cannot live authentically in the midst of history; and we are persuaded that historical mission calls for a disciplined people.

6. We have been driven by the new concern of the People of God for radical renewal within the renewal forces of our time. This necessitates creative experiments of many kinds and various forms; we deem this corporate discipline to be one such experiment for the renewal of the People of God.

7. We have been driven by the new confrontation with the witness of our Ancestors who stood in this commitment in their own times. Whenever a profound affirmation of the mystery, depth and greatness of existence has been discovered anew in the past, there has followed a new sense of mission to the world and intentional discipline for the sake of that mission.

8. We finally acknowledge and confess that we have been driven by the new awareness of the People of God, born of our times, that all people live consciously or unconsciously by some structure and that self-aware people do and must exist in a self-consciously ordered life. Discipline is a concern of our age both inside and outside of the intentional People of God.

IV

9. We must always remember and ever remind one another that in our corporate discipline we begin with the transparent happening of Profound Humanness; we do not strive toward it. Our covenant is a sign and symbol of our immutable standing before Being-itself--the Nameless One; it must never be perverted into a means to that end. Being's acceptance of us is unconditionally given. It is therefore utterly impossible and unnecessary to strive for meaning and purpose for our lives through this or any other work, no matter how significant.

10. This means, and let us ever be clear about it, that our covenant is solely for the sake of the common mission to which we have been called. By-productive consequences there may be, but the rule is not directed toward the nourishment of our religious life, the development of a sense of togetherness, the creation of harmonious relationships, for the establishment of human community as such, in any form. Our common rule thrusts us upon our task and exists only for the sake of that task.

11. We must always remember and ever remind one another that while our corporate discipline does and must make explicit certain structures in which we labour, our common existence is in no sense and at no time synonymous with or reducible to structures of any kind, hidden or disclosed, written or unwritten. Human relationships remain mysteriously beyond the power of human reason to articulate and any order to contain.

12. Again, let us also be aware that though our covenant necessarily has a definite fixedness and a certain rigidity, it must always be kept pliable, ready for adjustment to the varying needs, situations and obligations of the different individuals participating in it.

Finally, and most important, the total rule must constantly be maintained as open for alteration, for continuing development, and indeed for complete discontinuation.

13. We must always remember and ever remind one another that in our corporate discipline, we no longer live and work alone as isolated individuals. Henceforth our historical calling and mission, our corporate being and doing, our personal thinking and acting, are embodied in a definite community itself incorporated into the total life and mission of the the People of God in history. All people, hiddenly or overtly live out of some community; in our moral covenant we make our social being explicitly intentional.

14. On the other hand, we dare not forget that moral covenants are never for the purpose of escaping the burden of selfhood. Authentic, self-consciously disciplined community does not swallow the individual; it rather creates the very possibility of personhood by pushing the individual against the necessity to decide for himself/herself and then holding accountability for the consequences of this action. Genuine participation in the structures of community and authentic individuality are two poles of the same reality.

15. We must always remember and ever remind one another that in our corporate discipline we are both responsible to and for one another. Not only must each one of us carry the burden of his/her own relation to the rule, but we must each bear the loyalty and disloyalty of our brothers and sisters under the rule. We must assume responsibility for intruding into the other's existence up to the point of the individual's freedom and, in turn, freely open ourselves to the other's responsibility to intrude into our life up the point of our self-conscious relationship to Final Reality.

16. Furthermore, let us never forget that though we are utterly bound by our covenant, we remain free at any time and in any circumstance to break the covenant; never, to be sure, by default in decision but by self-conscious free resolve made in the light of other claims which other covenants in life lay upon us. In one sense, a rule was made to be broken and the disloyalty taken freely upon ourselves. Our covenant thrusts upon us our freedom and responsibility.

17. We must always remember and ever remind each other that though our corporate discipline necessarily must include within it explicit ways and means of accounting before one another and exposing ourselves to our colleagues, it is never to the end of maintaining the rule intact, never for the sake of judgement in and for itself, but rather to provide opportunity for taking upon ourselves afresh our freedom to be responsible persons in our mission.

18. Moreover, we must bear in mind that such explicit opening of ourselves through our covenant to our promises before the gaze of another, though not determining our objective guilt, does bring many hidden guilts to the surface of our lives. Such intensifying of our sensitivities to guilt in a community grounded in the word of acceptance becomes a great gift. The releasing of hidden guilt and

the possibility of embracing the same, is that without which we cannot and do not have life.

19. We must always remember and ever remind each other that a corporate discipline involves a kind of total commitment; those who enter into it therefore must do so through their own individual free resolve in such a fashion that the rule become their own life discipline and not some demand thrust upon them by another. And if the covenant is to remain an imperative from within ourselves rather than an alien pressure from without, it must ever and again be renewed with an abandonment which mixes our total being with it.

20. Nevertheless it is utterly necessary that any covenant be understood and held as relative: relative before our relation to Being-itself and the gift of profound acceptance and the awesome possibility of living our real lives; relative to our engagement in the world. For this reason it must continually be grasped as open-ended; responsible discontinuation will then be an ever-present possibility for everyone involved; our concrete concern for one another will insure that such a course be taken only in the same sobriety and fear of God that our entrance into the covenant demands.